

Physical therapy helps Don Peterson teach golf

By Martin Sinderman
Special to Atlanta Business Chronicle

Golf's popularity is at an all-time high. The lure of the links is enticing a whole new generation of golfers, an increasingly diverse group whose appetite for green space and light exercise is growing at a rapid rate. Ample evidence of this phenomenon can be found not only in the form of crowded courses, but also in the glut of instructional books, videos and gadgets advertised as being vital to a good golf swing.

After exhausting various other approaches, most golfers eventually turn to personal golf lessons.

Like most golfers, this is how Don Peterson, teaching professional at the Marietta City Club, was taught to swing a golf club. Unlike most golfers, Peterson overcame his early training, became a member of the Professional Golfers of America and has enjoyed a 15-year career as a touring and teaching professional. At The Swing Factory, his golf academy located at the Marietta City Club, both duffers and more experienced players can enjoy learning the right way to swing a golf club in a course of instruction based upon Peterson's somewhat non-traditional methods.

Peterson, who as a youth practiced his swing by hitting golf balls down rows of corn on his family's farm in Illinois, models his teaching approach along the lines of the discipline of physical therapy. "A physical therapist tries to help a patient with motion deficiencies by building upon a base of simple movements," he says. According to Peterson, his job involves a similar course of action in eliminating swing deficiencies. "Although the golf swing is pretty complex," he notes, "it can easily be broken down into a series of simple motions that add up to a fully functional, effective and repeatable swing."

The form of training Peterson has developed for golf is based on what is clinically known as Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation, or PNF. "Physical therapists have been using this type of muscle training for years on stroke patients who have lost motion and feeling in their limbs," he says. "By repeatedly moving injured limbs through their proper motions, it is possible to reopen the damaged nerve channels that run from the muscles directly to the brain."

Peterson utilizes a series of what he calls "kinesthetic" drills (i.e., drills that build upon the body's perception of movement) to fix bad swings or establish good ones. "By using kinesthetic drills to train the muscles and the mind to recognize the fundamental feel of a good golf swing," he notes, "we can transfer this 'muscle knowledge' to cue the proper swinging of the golf club."

Peterson's drills go by names such as the Dance Drill, the Mummy Drill, the Pillow Drill and the Punch Bowl Drill. They utilize a combination of simple motions, toys and common household objects, rather than the swinging of golf clubs and the hitting of balls.

"When we use these drills to train the muscles and the mind in the correct feel of a fundamental golf swing," says Peterson, "the kinesthetic associations we create help cue the motion of a good golf swing," a phenomenon physical therapists



Don Peterson: teaches student Chip Hurley at Marietta City Club

pists call transference. Peterson's drills are the main focus of his upcoming book, "How to Train Your Golf Muscles for Your Best Swing," which will be out in the spring of this year.

Peterson combines simple motion drills with high-tech training techniques on-site at The Swing Factory. New students first undergo an in-depth personality profile interview "that determines whether they are thinkers, lookers and/or feelers," when it comes to learning, he explains.

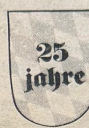
This is followed by an analysis by the Sportech Swing Analyzer, a computerized swing analyzer which breaks down the student's swing into a series of numerical components for review by Peterson. Based upon the personality profile and swing analysis, he then designs an individualized course of instruction that builds upon his drills.

Only after the various drills are mastered does a student get to practice with a golf club and ball, says Peterson. "By training initially without actually teeing up," he notes, "students can get the positive psychological benefits of success by mastering new patterns of movement without concentrating on the flight of a golf ball."

Peterson's teaching techniques have won him much acclaim recently. "Don Peterson has come up with one of the truly innovative golf instruction programs in the country," says Pete Wofford, Pro Report Editor of Golf World magazine. His innovative style is complemented by his personality.

"The traditional method of teaching and learning the golf swing is the major reason a wonderful and satisfying game such as golf becomes a fusing game of major frustration and confusion for many players, both at the amateur and professional levels," says Peterson. "Most people are conditioned to believe they should watch videos and beat balls to improve their golf swing," he notes. His methods, which emphasize building a swing "from the ground up, from the inside to the outside, and from the big to the small muscles," allows the correct motion components of the golf swing to become firmly fixed in his students' mind and muscle memories, according to Peterson. "After that, they have no trouble in shaving strokes from their scores."

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